

UTAH'S THREE PIONEER WOMEN

HENRY WARD BEECHER was once asked the number of men there were in his congregation and he replied, "Seven thousand."

"And how many women?"

"Oh, well," said the great preacher with a wink, "you know the men embrace the women."

That has been such a patent truth in the history of the human family that comparatively few men ever did anything worthy of record wherein some woman did not partially share in the work if not always in the glory. In every mighty event or juncture in the march of humanity woman has had her place, not always conspicuous to the public, but oftentimes embodying the very genius and influence necessary to a successful issue. Indeed the delicate touch of her hand is seen on every part of the broad canvas of the world's history. If in such a wondrous undertaking as the pioneering of Utah, woman had had no place it would have been a lamentable hiatus in the order of great events. But such was not to be recorded. While there were only three representatives of the sex in that immortal band that paved its path of glory, the distinction fell upon worthy spirits. If that were the only achievement in their lives that would entitle them to be called noble, it would be quite enough for the most ambitious woman, but the marked virtues of Harriet Page Wheeler Young, Clara Decker Young and Ellen Sanders Kimball had made them noble before they ever planted their feet on the trackless plains. These ladies were the wives of the late Lorenzo Dow Young, President Brigham Young and President Heber C. Kimball respectively, and were met companions for those undaunted men. Until they arrived in the Salt Lake valley there is no record of any white woman ever setting foot on this now fruitful, but then forbidding land.

HARRIET P. WHEELER YOUNG.

This pioneer woman of Utah was born in the little town of Hillsborough, Hillsborough county, New Hampshire, on the 7th of September, 1809. She was the oldest child of Oliver Wheeler and Hannah Ashby, her father being a native of New Hampshire and her mother of Massachusetts. She had three brothers and one sister, Clarissa Carolina. Her brothers were Charles Oliver, Henry Hammond, and Benjamin Franklin.

Harriet's ancestors were from Wales, having emigrated to America five generations before she was born. There were three Wheeler brothers, Abraham, Simon and Oliver, who crossed the

ocean to cast their fortunes upon the western world and the subject of this sketch was the descendant of Oliver. When about two years old she removed from her birthplace with her parents to Salem, Massachusetts, the birthplace of her mother. She attended school until she was ten years of age when she entered one of the Salem factories where she became an expert spinner of flax and wool, and equally efficient as a weaver, milliner and cook. These were some of the good old domestic accomplishments with which every true and modest young lady of that day was wont to equip herself before assuming the responsibilities of matrimony. She was a girl of a refined disposition and sensitively opposed to every aspect of immorality. A story is told of how a determined but intemperate suitor by the name of Coates was repulsed by her and on one occasion had to flee from a house in which she had taken refuge from him.

When seventeen years of age she moved to New York state to teach school near the little town of Phelps in Ontario county, and about four miles from the hill Corners. The same year she formed the acquaintance of Isaac Decker and married him, the year being 1827. Nineteen months later she gave birth to her first child, Lucy, now one of the widows of President Brigham Young. She later became the mother of two other children, Charles, and Harriet, who were born at Phelps.

The Decker family removed to Freedom, Chatteraugus county, New York. On July 22nd, 1828, their daughter Caroline, was born. The latter was destined to cross the plains with her mother as the wife of President Young. Harriet's fifth child, a daughter, who became Mrs. Fanny Little, was also born at Freedom. The Decker family a year or two later moved to New Portage, Portage county, Ohio, where they first heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which they promptly embraced. Subsequently they removed to Franklin, a few miles from Kirtland.

Isaac Decker was a prosperous farmer and had gathered considerable means around him, but when the call was made he freely placed everything he had upon the altar to relieve the financial distress of the Church. In the fall of 1837 the family went to Kirtland, penniless and at the time the Saints were leaving that city under the stress of dire persecution. They desired to leave with their friends but were unable to. In their extremity, however, Lorenzo Dow Young gave Mr. Decker a team and outfit and assisted him in preparing to leave. They started in 1837 for Missouri and after a difficult journey they arrived in Nauvoo and settled in Davess county. They were exposed to the bitter storm that descended upon the Saints in Missouri and after the extermination order of Governor Boggs they fled to Quincy, Illinois. From there the Deckers went to Winchester, where they lived in peace for several years. It was here that Harriet's son, Isaac Perry, was born. In 1841 the family moved to Nauvoo, where the husband and wife separated and Harriet became the wife



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of Lorenzo Dow Young, who had been a true friend of the family in Ohio and Missouri. The marriage ceremony was performed on the 9th of March, 1843. Harriet and her husband, "Uncle Lorenzo," remained in Nauvoo until after the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, when they fled from the city at the time of the exodus. They settled at "Winter Quarters," on the Missouri river, and in the spring when the companies were being prepared to leave for the great unknown West, Harriet was permitted to remain with her husband

because she was in delicate health and he was afraid that she would die, if he left her in the Missouri bottoms. No mistake was made when it was decided to let her come for she proved to be a blessing all along the weary journey where she nursed the sick and did a thousand other things that only a noble, energetic woman can think of. Although she was in frail health she never became a burden to anyone but indeed as has been said a blessing to many, not including those she nursed through sickness. She arrived in the valley on the memorable 24th of July,

1847, with an awful heartache at the thought of passing the remainder of her days in such a desolate and barren place. But her heart was brave and strong and she flung despair to the winds. In 1849 she returned to the Missouri river with her husband who had come to assist his brother Joseph to Utah. On her return in 1850 she nearly lost her life while driving through a river but her cool presence of mind saved her. On one occasion while living where the Beehive house now stands she was saved from a savage Indian by her husband's faithful dog.

But as was characteristic of her, when the animal was finally induced to release the red-skin, Mrs. Young dressed his wound and sent him on his way a wiser, and it is to be hoped, a better Indian. Courage, energy and magnanimity were signal qualities in her life. When at last, on December 22, 1871, at the age of 69 years, she passed to her rich reward, all the people of the valleys mourned her inestimable loss.

CLARA DECKER YOUNG.

The history of this noble woman has already been partially told in the narrative of her mother's life. She was born at Freedom, Chatteraugus county, New York, on the 22nd of July, 1824. She was a delicate child being afflicted with asthma from her infancy. Strange as it may seem in the light of the hardships and exposures she passed through in after life, her parents hardly dared to hope that she would live beyond childhood. When she was three years old she ran under her father's ax while he was chopping wood, and before he could prevent it the blade was lodged in her skull. The father, wild with horrifying emotions, bore his child into the house. She appeared to be dead but eventually showed some signs of life, and by careful nursing she was able to speak after a lapse of one year. She literally flattered between life and death for six months. The removing of the family to Ohio, Missouri and Illinois has already been related. Clara possessed her mother's rare courage and presence of mind and although a child of only ten years of age she passed bravely through all the terrifying scenes of Missouri. When fifteen years of age she passed through a long siege of sickness which threatened her life, but she was spared to finish her noble mission. On the 8th of May, 1843, she was married to President Brigham Young, being a little more than sixteen years of age. She remained by the side of her husband in the exodus from Nauvoo, at Winter Quarters and when the Pioneer band, led by her great and wise spouse set out on their momentous journey she remained bravely by his side. In that long and perilous journey, although not a strong woman physically, her brave spirit and stout heart rendered her a valuable adjunct to that immortal company.

After arriving in the valley of the great Salt Lake she at once began to do what she could to make a habitable place for herself and husband. Her career in Utah is marked for its energy, nobility and courage, and when at last, her noble race was run hundreds of heads were bowed in profound sorrow. She died on Jan. 5, 1901.